

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR BLOG

Eco-mom-ics: 5 fast facts about mothers in the U.S. economy

Filed in Special Initiatives, Wages and Benefits, Women • By: Erin George, Gretchen Livingston • May 9, 2024



As Mother's Day fast approaches, let's celebrate moms not just for their role in their families, but also for their integral role in the U.S. economy. The often undervalued labor of mothers – whether it's in the form of paid or unpaid work – is critical to keep homes, communities and the nation running. Almost three-fourths (74%) of moms with children under 18 are working in the labor force, and beyond that, moms are performing the unpaid work of caring for their children, completing household chores and volunteering in the wider community. It's no wonder many moms are stretched thin.

This Mother's Day, here are five fast facts about mothers in the economy:

1. 40.5% of all mothers with children under 18 are equal, primary or sole income earners for their family. This share is especially large for Black moms: While 36.4% of White, non-Hispanic mothers and 39.3% of Hispanic mothers are equal, primary or sole breadwinners, the percentage of Black mothers is a staggering 65.9%.
2. On top of performing paid work an average of 35.5 hours a week and doing chores for 13.2 hours a week, employed mothers aged 18–64 today spend more time actively caring for their children than their mothers and grandmothers did almost 50 years ago. In 2022, employed mothers with a child under 18 spent an average of approximately 12.5 hours per week on active child care, according to a Women's Bureau analysis of the American Time Use Survey. In contrast, in 1975 all mothers – whether they were in the labor force or not – spent an average of 8.6 hours per week actively caring for their children (and 23.6 hours on housework). Simply put, even though women are now spending substantially more time in paid employment than they were 50 years ago, they are spending over 40% more time actively caring for their children.

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3. In addition to taking care of their own children and households, many mothers spend time improving their community. In fact, in a 12-month period between 2020 and 2021, nearly two in three mothers living with a child under 18 (59.6%) volunteered with an organization or to improve their neighborhood, according to a Women's Bureau analysis of the Current Population Survey. The 31% of mothers who volunteered for an organization during this period provided an average of nearly 60 hours of volunteering time.
4. Even after their children are grown, many mothers continue to provide unpaid care as grandmothers. In 2021, 1.3 million U.S. women were raising their grandchildren – 2.3 million kids in all. These numbers only refer to cases where grandmothers were providing housing and were responsible for most of the daily needs of the grandchildren – they do not account for the hours of babysitting that many grandmothers provide for their grandchildren.
5. When they have a child, women who work experience a “motherhood wage penalty” that results in lower earnings even after controlling for education, occupation and other characteristics. Over their lifetimes, these lower wages, coupled with reduced work hours due to caregiving obligations, result in employment-related costs to mothers of more than \$295,000.

Mothers – and all caregivers – deserve to thrive at home and at work. To achieve this, we need to support both the paid and the unpaid work moms do. This means improving our care infrastructure, including access to affordable child care, free and universal pre-K and adequate paid family and medical leave. It also means ensuring quality jobs with family-sustaining wages for the care workforce. To support both paid and unpaid caregivers, the Biden-Harris Administration issued an executive order to increase access to high-quality care and support caregivers, and the Department of Labor published guidance for employers hoping to take advantage of federal infrastructure funding on how they can support child care and long-term care for their workers.

These policies would likely help many in the U.S. and relieve a significant portion of the pressure on moms. Moreover, they would bolster the U.S. economy. A more robust care infrastructure would likely increase the number of women, especially mothers, who enter the labor market. Indeed, if women's labor force participation in the U.S. were comparable to that of Canada or Germany – countries that invest more in family-supporting policies – then the U.S. labor force would gain about 5 million more women, generating \$775 billion in additional economic activity each year, according to Women's Bureau estimates.

For more data on mothers in the economy, check out the Women's Bureau's website.

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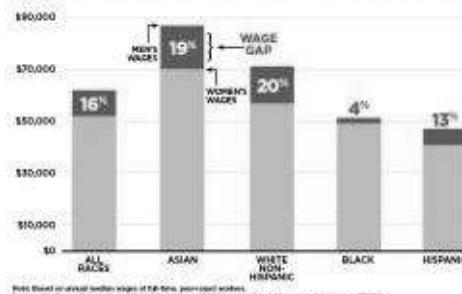
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